



CAMERATA, QPAC AND BRISBANE FESTIVAL
PRESENT

THE CONFERENCE OF THE BIRDS



The program runs for approximately 75 minutes without interval.

We'd love to meet you after the concert.

Please join us in the foyer – we'll be there as soon as we can!

OVERTURE

Felix Mendelssohn Sinfonia No. 10 in B Minor
Adagio-Allegro

THE CONFERENCE OF THE BIRDS

Ralph Vaughan Williams *The Lark Ascending:*
Romance for Violin and Orchestra
Section 1 (Andante Sostenuto)

Peter Sís Part I: Conference
Part II: Birds realise it will be a difficult journey
Part III: The birds fill all the corners of the world

Lembit Beecher *The Conference of the Birds, Movement I*

Peter Sís Part IV: *The Seven Valleys*

Lembit Beecher *The Conference of the Birds, Movement II a*

Peter Sís PART V: *In which Mountain of Kaf appears in the distance*

Lembit Beecher *The Conference of the Birds, Movement II b*

Ralph Vaughan Williams *The Lark Ascending.*
Section 2 (Allegretto tranquillo to end)

ARTISTS

Liz Buchanan, actor
Brendan Joyce, solo violin
Camerata - Queensland's Chamber Orchestra

ILLUSTRATIONS

Peter Sís, illustrator and text
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ABOUT THE MUSIC

FELIX MENDELSSOHN

(1809-1847)

String Symphony No. 10 in B minor

Adagio-Allegro

The young Mendelssohn did not waste his time in idle pursuits. At the age of ten, he was rising at 5am six days a week and his timetable seems to have been carefully mapped out:

I have six hours of Latin a week: two for Caesar, two for Ovid, one for grammar, and one for exercises... In mathematics I am reading the Fifth Book of Euclid... In addition, Fanni and I have two hours of history, two of arithmetic, one of geography and one of German. The violin progresses well – I have two lessons a week... Also on Monday and Tuesday I go to the Singakademie... My work schedule is organised so that I prepare tasks in the evening that I have received in the morning.

As well as the violin, he was learning the piano – he had given his first public performance at the age of nine – and studying harmony and composition with Carl Zelter, the director of the Singakademie, regularly turning in exercises in ‘figured bass, chorale, invertible counterpoint, and two- and three-part canon and fugue’. Theatre historian and regular visitor Eduard Devrient reported that it took only his mother saying, ‘Felix, are you doing nothing?’ for the young lad to cut short any lingering over lunch and disappear hastily back into his room.

But where a life of such discipline might have been expected to produce only dry, academic exercises and childish imitations of the old masters, Mendelssohn thrived. (Goethe described him as having ‘the smallest possible modicum of the phlegmatic, and the maximum of the opposite quality’.) He was soon composing in his own right and within a single year produced over 50 pieces, including trios, sonatas, partsongs and three light operas. Certainly, his early compositions show a clear debt to the models of the past – J.S. Bach at first and then Mozart and Haydn – but they also reveal the originality and imagination of the young composer. Goethe, who remembered meeting the seven-year-old Mozart, had no hesitation in ranking Mendelssohn’s keyboard improvisations ahead of Mozart’s.

It was as an exercise that Zelter suggested to Mendelssohn a series of string symphonies modelled on the famous set composed by C.P.E. Bach in 1773. Mendelssohn wrote 12 of these symphonies between 1821 and 1823; the first five favour solidly contrapuntal, Baroque-style textures in four parts – though manipulated with great skill and fluency – but Mendelssohn soon begins to experiment in structure and texture, and the later string symphonies explore more unusual groupings of instruments and show a fine understanding of the possibilities of drama inherent in sonata form.

The String Symphony No. 10 consists of a single movement with a slow introduction, but this single span of music is equivalent in scale to all three movements of one of the earlier string symphonies. The grave but elegant Adagio begins over a pizzicato pedal with sustained but articulated harmonies that seem reluctant to move out of the minor mode; once quietly and safely arrived in the relative major key of D, the gentle mood is punctuated by sudden unison outbursts, like drum rolls, until the first violins soothe the turbulence and the introduction floats away on delicate rising scale figures.

The Allegro plunges suddenly back into the depths with scurrying lower strings – two independent viola parts (recalling Mozart's affection for the viola, especially in the String Quintets) add a special richness to the texture – accompanying an agitated first subject set low in the violins' register. The rising scale motif which ended the introduction so gently is now transformed into an aggressive unison ushering in the tempestuous transition to the second subject which is the eye of the movement's storm: out of the urgency of the first subject Mendelssohn has derived a warm, relaxed theme, still stated first in the violins' lower register but now reassuring and expansive. The calm is shattered by the return of the storm, but this time it subsides quickly and, incredibly, the exposition closes with an almost exact repeat of the pianissimo ethereal rising scales from the end of the introduction. The relentless hurly-burly resumes in the development section, eventually subsiding into the more sinister nervousness of the piano first subject as the recapitulation begins. Mendelssohn makes a feature of his double violas at the end of the second subject when the violins drop out altogether and the three lowest parts sigh themselves almost to nothing; then the busyness takes over again and the symphony rushes to a close with a flamboyant coda.

Like most of Mendelssohn's early works, the string symphonies remained unpublished during his lifetime and were only 'rediscovered' in the late 1950s. They offer remarkable insights into the development of the composer, and in a sense humanise for us what formerly we could only understand as the miracle of the 16-year-old youth's Octet springing fully formed out of nowhere. But more than this, they grace our concert halls with more fine works by a musical genius.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS

(1872-1958)

The Lark Ascending – Romance for Violin and Orchestra

The Lark Ascending has undoubtedly become Vaughan Williams' most popular work. It was fully drafted in 1914 as a work for violin and piano, but the composition had to be set aside due to the outbreak of the First World War. Vaughan Williams' professional musical life ceased completely for the next four years, as he served as an ambulance driver during the war, shuttling wounded and dying soldiers from the battlefield to temporary field hospitals in France and Greece. It was only after the war ended that he was able to return home to England and to his compositional work.

One of his first tasks was to revise *The Lark Ascending*. It was eventually premiered in its violin and piano form in December 1920 by the English violinist Marie Hall, to whom the work is dedicated. The orchestration of the score was completed in early 1921, and Hall gave the first performance of this, the more frequently played version, shortly afterwards in London's Queen's Hall with the British Symphony Orchestra under Adrian Boult.

Despite the work's lengthy gestation period and the harrowing, life-changing experiences endured by the composer at the time, none of the terror or anguish of war is evident in the music. It is, in fact, an ideal example of Vaughan Williams' contemplative and nostalgic musical style. The solo violin spins unbroken arches of melody and swirling arabesques almost continually throughout, and there is no contrasting material or abrupt formal changes to disturb the organic unfolding and rapturous atmosphere. The orchestration is restrained, gently supporting the solo violin for most of the work's duration. The 'Romance' of the subtitle, perhaps a reference to Beethoven's two violin Romances, alludes to Vaughan Williams' long-standing love and adoration of nature.

The Lark Ascending could be described as a musical reflection upon the poem of the same name written by the English novelist George Meredith in 1881. Only selected lines from the poem are printed in the musical score and the poetic content is used as a point of stimulus for the composer's lyrical reverie. The solo violin clearly embodies the spirit of a bird singing and taking flight (with occasional bird calls also provided by the woodwind instruments), whilst the sustained chords, played by the strings, could be understood as the aural depiction of a flat pastoral landscape.

The form of the work is rhapsodic, with lengthy ornamental solo cadenzas beginning and concluding the piece. These are notated without bar lines and in no strict tempo, thus giving the interpreter considerable freedom and liberty in interpretation. The floating quality of the harmony is partly due to Vaughan Williams' characteristic use of a pentatonic (five-tone) mode, which weakens the strong directional pull of conventional tonality. This modality continues in the central dance-like section, which is initiated by the woodwinds. Throughout his life, Vaughan Williams collected and studied English folk-music, and although no specific folk tune is directly quoted here, its strong influence is apparent.

James Cuddeford © 2017

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THE LARK ASCENDING

BY GEORGE MEREDITH (1828-1909)

*He rises and begins to round,
He drops the silver chain of sound,
Of many links without a break,
In chirrup, whistle, slur and shake.*

*For singing till his heaven fills,
'Tis love of earth that he instils,
And ever winging up and up,
Our valley is his golden cup,
And he the wine which overflows
To lift us with him when he goes.*

*Till lost on his aerial rings
In light, and then the fancy sings.*

ABOUT THE WORDS

THE CONFERENCE OF THE BIRDS

The composer, Lembit Beecher writes, *The Conference of the Birds* is a 12th-century Sufi epic poem by the Persian poet Farid ud-Din Attar. It tells a story about the birds of the world who gather together in a time of strife. Led by the hoopoe bird, they decide to set out on a long journey to find their king. Many birds desert or die along the journey, but after passing through valley after valley, the remaining 30 arrive at a lake at the top of a mountain. Looking in the lake at their own reflection, they realize they are in fact looking at their king.

I first came across it through an adaptation by the brilliant Czech-American illustrator and author Peter Sís. This was one of the most beautiful books I had ever seen: an adult picture book with an unusual graphic sensibility, a concise and beautifully ambiguous text, and full-page illustrations of mysterious landscapes that carried surprising emotional weight. Numerous adaptations of the original poem, including plays, children's books and pieces of music, emphasised the story's simple yet colourful narrative and moral didacticism, but what drew me to Sís's version, aside from the expressive, textural drawings which so suggested music, was the deep sense of loss in the pages. So many birds are left by the wayside during this journey towards truth and self-discovery. Does progress or attempted progress always come at a cost? What are we to make of the hoopoe who leads so many others to their deaths even as a few find enlightenment?

I initially thought about trying to turn the story into an opera – but I realised I was less interested in the narrative scope of the story than in the emotions and visceral energy of specific moments. I also knew I wanted to write music as Sís created his drawings, with strong gestures and lots of small figures combining to form large shapes. A string orchestra seemed perfect for creating solo lines that gathered into clouds of sounds. When I began talking to A Far Cry about writing a piece, I realised this would be a perfect project for the group. Having gotten to know the group, I wanted to write music for individual personalities: each member of the ensemble has his/her own part. These parts join each other in different combinations, but just as quickly split up again. The leadership of the music, and the relationship of individuals to the group is always changing. As I wrote I thought about the power of crowds, the motivating capability – both dangerous and inspiring – of leaders, and the distinct values of individuality and unity, but I also thought about the players of A Far Cry, and how much I admire the way they function as an ensemble, share leadership, and make music together.



ABOUT THE CREATORS

LEMBIT BEECHER

Composer

Praised by *The San Francisco Chronicle* as “hauntingly lovely and deeply personal,” Lembit Beecher’s music combines “alluring” textures (*The New York Times*) and vividly imaginative colours with striking, emotional immediacy. Noted for his collaborative spirit and “ingenious” interdisciplinary projects (*The Wall Street Journal*), Lembit has served three-year terms as the Music Alive composer-in-residence of the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra and the inaugural composer-in-residence of Opera Philadelphia in collaboration with Gotham Chamber Opera and Music-Theatre Group. A constant across his wide range of works is a potent sense of drama, which manifests itself through a quirky, thoughtful musical language, filled with both poignant intimacy and propulsive rhythmic energy.

Born to Estonian and American parents, Lembit grew up under the redwoods in Santa Cruz, California, a few miles from the wild Pacific. Since then he has lived in Boston, Houston, Ann Arbor, Berlin, New York and Philadelphia, earning degrees from Harvard, Rice and the University of Michigan. This varied background has made him particularly sensitive to place, ecology, memory, and the multitude of ways in which people tell stories.

Recent premieres include *Say Home* for the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, *The Conference of the Birds* for A Far Cry, *100 Years Grows Shorter Over Time* for the Julliard String Quartet, and *Sky on Swings*, a chamber opera for Opera Philadelphia starring Frederica von Stade and Marietta Simpson. Based on a libretto by Hannah Moscovitch and directed by Joanna Settle, the opera follows the relationship of two women diagnosed with Alzheimer’s disease. “[Beecher] and [Moscovitch] have created a shattering musical and theatrical evocation of what it feels like to have Alzheimer’s disease,” wrote Heidi Waleson in the *The Wall Street Journal*. The opera was praised as, “a monumental achievement” (*Parterre*), “a triumph for everyone involved” (*Broadway World*), and “theatrically true and artistically distinguished ...[Beecher’s] musical invention is astonishing here.” (*Philadelphia Inquirer*).

Many of Lembit’s latest projects involve the incorporation of untraditional elements into opera, symphonic works and chamber music, including baroque instruments, sampled interviews, animation, electronically-controlled sound sculptures and devised theatre actors. In 2015 he received a major grant from the Pew Center for Arts and Heritage to develop and produce *Sophia’s Forest*, a chamber opera for soprano Kiera Duffy, the Aizuri Quartet, and a multi-piece sound sculpture, built in collaboration with architects and engineers at the University of Pennsylvania and Drexel University’s ExCITE Center.

This interdisciplinary approach was seen in Lembit’s first major dramatic work, the documentary oratorio *And Then I Remember*, which incorporated recorded interviews with his grandmother and subtle video elements. “Evoking laughter at times, chilling

nostalgia and a sense of timelessness,” (*CultureMap Houston*) the piece chronicles his grandmother’s journey from Estonia to the United States in the aftermath of World War II. Carl Schoonover, host at WKCR-89.9 FM, raved: “Lembit Beecher’s searing oratorio... employs microscopic historical narratives, the minutiae of human relations, and the cultural contingencies that shape them, to achieve a work of striking universality.” Completed while a fellow at the University of Michigan Institute for the Humanities, *And Then I Remember* won the Opera Vista Competition for new opera, and has been produced as a concert piece, semi-staged oratorio and fully staged opera in Ann Arbor, Houston, New York and San Francisco. Lembit’s New York City opera debut came in 2014 with Gotham Chamber Opera’s premiere of *I Have No Stories To Tell You*, staged in the medieval sculpture hall of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Paul Pelkonen, of Super-Conductor, hailed the work, a collaboration with librettist Hannah Moscovitch, as “richly written,” musically “hypnotic,” and a “harrowing account of post-traumatic stress disorder.”

Lembit’s work has been performed at the Tanglewood, Aspen and Cabrillo Music Festivals and by the New Jersey Symphony, Shepherd School Symphony, New York Youth Symphony, UNL Symphony Orchestra, University of Michigan Symphony Band, Tapestry New Opera, Opera Vista, Cantori NY, Ensemble ACJW, Del Sol String Quartet, Aizuri Quartet, Sospiro Winds, Third Sound, and Claremont Trio, among others. The Grand Prize Winner of the S&R Foundation’s Washington Award, he has received honours and grants from the American Music Center, New Music USA, ASCAP, American Composers Forum, and NewMusic@ECU. Lembit was a graduate fellow at the University of Michigan Institute for the Humanities, served as Visiting Assistant Professor of Music at Denison University, and has been in residence at the Copland House, MacDowell Colony, Penn Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, White Mountains Festival, Scrag Mountain Music, and the Decoda Skidmore Chamber Music Institute. Continually adventurous artistically, Lembit has worked on projects with vocalist Bobby McFerrin, choreographer Elizabeth Bergmann, artist/filmmaker Kevork Mourad, and the puppeteering group, An Exciting Event. Lembit’s primary teachers have included Evan Chambers, Bright Sheng, Karim Al-Zand, Pierre Jalbert, Kurt Stallmann and Bernard Rands. An advocate for Estonian contemporary music, Lembit is also active as a pianist and concert producer. He plays the concertina on special occasions.

ABOUT THE CREATORS

PETER SÍS

Author and Illustrator



Born in Brno in the former Czechoslovakia in 1949, Peter Sís is an internationally acclaimed illustrator, author and filmmaker. Sís is the author of more than twenty books and is the seven-time winner of *The New York Times*' Book Review Best Illustrated Book of the Year. Most recently, in 2007, he published *The Wall: Growing Up Behind the Iron Curtain*, which was awarded the Robert F. Sibert Medal and was also named a Caldecott Honor Book. Peter Sís was named a MacArthur Fellow in 2003. He lives in the New York City area with his wife and children.



GUEST ARTISTS & CREATIVES

LIZ BUCHANAN

Actor



Liz Buchanan is a Queensland actor working in theatre, musical theatre and TV. Her regular appearances with Queensland Theatre recently included Olivia in *Twelfth Night*, and Meg in the world premiere of Joanna Murray-Smith's *L'Appartement*. Liz is a nationally recognised voice-over artist for commercial and narration projects, and voices characters for animation.

RICHARD "ZAK" HARRISON

Lighting Designer



From his early days in the 1980s touring with some of Australia's prominent bands Zak has built an extensive resume working across all lighting disciplines. Working with Brisbane-based J LX Productions for the last 24 years as a Designer, Operator and Production Manager, Zak has cemented his reputation as a leader and mentor to many young technicians starting out their industry journey.

Across his 37-year career he has worked on well over 5000 events, festivals, corporate functions and arts projects. His recent works include Brisbane Festival, Bluesfest, Women in Voice, and Flamenco Fire's various productions since 2010. His Camerata performances include *Sara MacLiver* (2019), *Sisters* (2021), *Re-Mastered* (2021) and *Landscapes* (2021).

CAROLINE DE LORE

Floral Artist, Wilde Flora



Caroline de Lore is a floral artist and atelier purpose driven to connect people back to nature with her work. Inspired by the connection of flowers to music and poetry, and by our innate relationship to nature, Caroline seeks to inspire and draw people close to the natural environment by telling a story with natural sustainable elements and an organic and fluid style.

This is Caroline's second collaboration with Camerata. Her first was the acclaimed production *When the World was Wide* (2019), earning Caroline a Matilda Award nomination for Best Set Design.

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When purchasing tickets to venues, please ensure you familiarise yourself with their guidelines which may include contact tracing registration, social distancing when in foyers and upon entering and exiting spaces and practicing good hygiene.

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CAMERATA

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<i>Viola</i>	Anna Colville* Alice Buckingham Elizabeth Lawrence Sophie Ellis***
<i>Cello</i>	Katherine Philp* Karol Kowalik* ** Nathan Smith
<i>Double Bass</i>	Marian Heckenberg* Connor Bishop***
<i>French Horn</i>	Ysolt Clark*
<i>Flute</i>	Monika Koerner*
<i>Oboe</i>	Eve Newsome*
<i>Clarinet</i>	Rianne Wilschut*
<i>Bassoon</i>	Katherine Willison*

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* = principal

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